

Dear Sirs and Madams of the Committee on Labor and Public Employees.

My name is Peter Grusauskas and I reside in Goshen, Connecticut.

I am writing to voice opposition to the passage of Raised HB 6792. LOC #03374

I am the past President of the Goshen Volunteer Fire Company and have been asked by the current President and Fire Chief to speak on their behalf. I am also the owner operator of Goshen Oil Company Inc., a small 4th generation family business located in Goshen Connecticut.

As a member of the fire company, I have served for 40 years. Over half of that time as a chief officer and 16 years as their Chief. I am writing on behalf of the Fire Company, to oppose passage of HB 6792, which aims to include all volunteer fire departments and volunteer ambulance service under the umbrella of the DOL CONNOSHA. Currently most of these organizations do not fall under this umbrella, but rather, either fall under Federal OSHA and if exempted there, in all or part, then at the very least, fall under regulations and oversight of the EPA, DOT and State Department of Health and OEMS.

The department of labor has stated that we, the volunteer providers in this state are "cowboys" I'm here to tell you in near 40 years of volunteer service we are anything but cowboys. No volunteer gets up at two (2) in the morning, to an alarm beeper going off, that doesn't want to come back home in one (1) piece. We the volunteers are safe and I dare say have a better safety record than that of our "CONNOSHA covered" counterparts.

We volunteers, as I stated, do have oversight from various agencies, but the most in-depth and critical oversight is from ourselves as a group when critiquing and debriefing a completed mission. We continually redefine how we accomplish a mission, if we feel it could, or should, have gone better.

Last April, the 41 town's emergency services of Litchfield County through their Litchfield County Emergency Plan Organization resolved not to support this same bill presented last year, as they did on, the same bill the year before. The Department of Health advisory Board Volunteer Committee, of which I have served as a member since 1992, also has resolved not to support this bill for the last two consecutive years. We the volunteers in the state of Connecticut, rely on our state boards and commissions as well as our representatives to act in the best interest of our volunteer groups. We unfortunately do not get "paid time off" from our jobs to come and speak on a proposed bill, but please, don't take our silence as vote of endorsement.

The proposed bill is at best vague, in definitions, of what a Volunteer Fire or Ambulance service is. If a fire service, like many Volunteer Fire Services, pays a stipend to its officers, is it still considered volunteer? Many ambulance services in the state also pay a stipend or even have paid responder coverage, are they covered under this law or by Federal OSHA? How does an entity "demonstrate" if and when they are covered? Does the Entity have to be covered in all regulations at the Federal level or just one, to be exempt from the State OSHA?

The mission of CONNOSHA I believe "is to make a safe work environment for the residence of Connecticut to work in" and they have now, singled out fire and ambulance services but, turned a blind

eye to the countless other volunteer agencies within the state that, are as, or even more dangerous than EMS or most fire operations. NUSAR a volunteer underwater search and rescue team and others in the state like them, are not included in this oversight, yet like so many, k-9 search and rescue teams, as well as international, national and local ski patrols, ...wilderness rescue, high angle rope teams and the like, continue to provide, safely, the skill sets needed, to the Connecticut residents who find themselves in harm's way.

The current system in place does work... DoI cannot point to accident after accident within the volunteer ranks, because of reckless behaviors or disregard to existing standards such as those of NFPA. They actually have very little factual evidence to even have brought this bill forward, other than perhaps a desire to grow their bureaucracy and the need more staffing to handle the hundreds of new entities being brought under their umbrella.

We are glad that in this year's bill there is still an inclusion of the house amendment from HB 6434 in 2013, Section 2 item #3, but we would further ask, that if this bill is to continue to be brought forward. It would be changed to also include the amendment brought forward by Senator Roraback in the same 2013 session and again amended last year HB 5070, by Senator Chapin, which limits the ability for the state to assess fines for small minor type violations they may find in a volunteer organization and only have the power to assess fines and citations if there is willful negligence resulting in serious injury or death.

As we all know funds for volunteer agencies are tough to come by and it seems as, was the case in Kent in 2011, when they paid \$1260.00 for what I understand was a minor violation. That seems to me, a bit excessive.

The argument that with such limitations on fines, the Department of Occupational Health and Safety, could be seen as a paper tiger and have no teeth to effect change when a violation is discovered, is, I believe effectively untrue. If an entity is found to be in violation and given an order to take corrective action, then fails to follow through with correcting the violation, the department of OSHA has in its arsenal an array of punitive fines and actions it may take against such entity. This being said, any entity which would be brave enough to ignore such order from the State, would in effect be writing its own lawsuit death warrant, if someone or something were harmed from failing to act on that order. That in itself, would cause most persons in charge to react rather quickly to resolve the issue at hand.

I would beseech the Committee to not move this bill forward. If the committee does in fact move it forward, I would hope you add a section which mirrors the amendment made by the Senators regarding fines and citations.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and concerns with your committee.

Peter Grusauskas

Goshen Fire Company, Inc. Goshen Connecticut

February 25, 2015